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ACTION EA-15

INFO OCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-07 L-04 NSAE-00
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SUBJECT: SYMINGTON HEARINGS.

REF: BANGKOK 7203

1. ALTHOUGH PUBLICATION OF SYMINGTON TRANSCRIPT ON THAILAND CONTINUES TO ATTRACT LESS ATTENTION THEN WOULD HAVE BEEN THE CASE HAD IT APPEARED AT A LESS NEWS-FILLED PERIOD, COMMENT PERSISTS AND IN SOME CASES HAS BEEN QUITE HARSH. AS FORESHOWED PARA. 3 REFTEL, MOST ATTENTION AND MOST EMOTION-TINGED REACTION RELATES TO SUBJECT OF US FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR FORCES IN VIETNAM AND "MERCENARY" CHARGE.

THIS EVOKES A DIRECT CONNECTION WITH CURRENT CONSIDERATION OF THAI ASSISTANCE TO CAMBODIA.

2. INWAKE OF NEWS STORIES (ENGLISH-LANGUAGE POST FOR EXAMPLE CARRIED SERIES OF ARTICLES DEALING WITH "COMMITMENT", "SECRECY OF UNDERTAKINGS" AND THAI INTERNAL SECURITY AS WELL AS SUBJECT OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT), EDITORIAL COMMENT HAS APPEARED PRIMARILY IN PRACHATHIPATAI, PHIM THAI, THAI RATH, AND SIAM RATH (LAST NAMED WITH DAILY SERIES OF EDITORIALS OR COLUMNS).

3. SIAM RATH, THOUGH AT ONE POINT ASSERTING THAT ISSUE OF MONEY LESS IMPORTANT THEN QUESTION OF PROPER THAI POLICY TOWARD VIETNAM AND COMBODIA, HAS CRITICIZED RTG FOR ITS SILENCE IN WAKE OF REVELATIONS AND HAS EXPRESSED OPPOSITION TO TRADING THAI LIVES

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FOR AMERICAN DOLLARS, A PRACTICE WHICH BRINGS SHAME AND DISHONOR AND WILL CAUSE THAI GOVT TO BE CONDEMNED BY HISTORY. PRACHATHIPATIA ALSO SAID THAT PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE BEEN INFORMED OF FACTS CONCERNING US ASSISTANCE, AND THAT EXPLANATION STILL NEEDED OF WHAT WAS DONE WITH THE MONEY.

4. GENERAL READING PUBLIC HAS, OF COURSE, NO CONCEPTION OF COSTS OF EQUIPPING AND MAINTAINING A MILITARY FORCE OUT OF COUNTRY, AND AMIDST THE CRITICISM THERE HAVE BEEN NO SUGGESTIONS EITHER THAT THAI TROOPS SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN SENT OR THAT RTG SHOULD HAVE BORNE ALL COSTS. ONE SPECIFIC EFFORT AT CLARIFICATION HAS BEEN MADE BUT IT IS UNLIKELY TO PROVE AN EFFECTIVE ANTIDOTE TO THE PAIN FELT AS RESULT OF SUSPICION THAT INDEPENDENT THAI HAVE "SOLD OUT" TO RICH AMERICANS. NEDB CHIEF (AND FORMER BUDGET DIRECTOR) RENOO IS QUOTED IN JUNE 20 BANGKOK WORLD AS RESPONDING TO QUESTION WHETHER RTG COULD MAINTAIN BLACK PANTHERS IN VIETNAM WITHOUT CONTROVERSIAL US PAYMENTS, "I'LL MAKE MY ANSWER SHORT AND SWEET-- NO."

5. SEVERAL EDITORIALS HAVE COMMENTARIES RUN ON DIRECTLY FROM SYMINGTON "REVELATIONS" TO CURRENT QUESTION OF AID TO CAMBODIA. ALTHOUGH MAJORITY SUPPORT GOVT POLICY, THERE HAS BEEN SOME SPECIFIC OPPOSITION TO IDEA OF DESPATCH OF MILITARY FORCES, ON GROUNDS THAT HELP SHOULD BE DIRECTED TOWARD "FRIENDLY CAMBODIAN PEOPLE" RATHER THAN TOWARD SPECIFIC GOVERNMENT AND SHOULD TAKE FORM OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. AND RELIEF \$

6. WE HAVE THUS FAR JUDGED THAT BEST ATTITUDE TO TAKE LOCALLY IS TO FOLLOW THAI TACTIC OF LYING LOW (I.E. SILENT), AND HAVE SOUGHT TO CONVEY POSITION ASPECTS BROUGHT OUT BE HEARINGS ONLY IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS. WE CONTINUE TO BE CONCERNED, HOWEVER, BY THE DISTORTED IMAGE LEFT FROM NEARLY EXCLUSIVE PRESS CONCENTRATION HERE AND IN US ON SECRETS AND MONEY. PARTICULARLY DISTURBING IN THIS CONNECTION IS CRITICAL WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL (CARRIED PARIS TRIBUNE JUNE 13-14 EDITION) WHICH REPEATEDLY WRENCHES AMBASSADOR'S STATEMENTS OUT OF CONTEXT. HOPE DEPARTMENT WILL BE ALERT OF OPPORTUNITIES TO INSERT BALANCING OR CORRECTIVE COMMENTS. EXEMPT. UNGER

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